

# SESSION 2004 REPORT

7TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Rep. Cathy McMorris

Rep. Bob Sump

## Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 2004 legislative session is underway, and with it comes new challenges and opportunities. One of the things we must do this year is approve a supplemental ("off year") budget and make any necessary mid-course corrections. Last month Gov. Locke proposed a budget that includes \$193 million in new spending and spends our reserves down from \$544 million to just \$172 million. With Washington's economy struggling to recover, now is not the time to enact new taxes and fees that create additional hardships for families and employers. Instead, we must continue the work begun last year and show citizens they can trust the Legislature to **show fiscal restraint**. This is one of our top 2004 priorities.

Another challenge – and opportunity – we face this year is **improving our state's business climate**. Last session we made significant strides toward reforming Washington's costly unemployment insurance system and began fixing workers' compensation. But we have more work to do. This year we must follow through on reforms that cut regulations and make Washington more competitive and attractive to job providers. This year are working with our House Republican colleagues to pursue several "better business" bills, including making more changes to our still-faltering workers compensation program and putting the brakes on industrial insurance rates.

We are honored to be serving you in Olympia. As always, we invite your participation through your calls, letters and e-mails. **Thank you for this opportunity to serve you.**

Sincerely,



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Toll-free Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000

## Making Washington More Competitive

The entire state celebrated when we got the news Boeing will complete the 7E7 final assembly in Washington. Just as important as the project, though, was that the urgency of responding to Boeing last year gave us and other employer advocates in the Legislature a unique opportunity to enact reforms we've been advocating for many years. We were able to push through major **reforms to our unemployment insurance system, begin making changes to our workers' compensation system, and adopt a budget that didn't raise taxes.** These improvements to our business climate helped Boeing, but they have also had a very positive impact on small and large employers across the state.



But our work is not done. We are working to rein in **over-burdensome regulations** and the agencies that impose them. And we are also supporting a plan that would **reduce costly, government-imposed mandates** on insurance plans and give employers more flexibility to offer **affordable, basic health coverage for working families.**

These changes will position our state for a strong economic recovery – and create needed jobs and prosperity for families.

## Workers Compensation: It's time for action, not study

Although we've made strides toward improving Washington's workers' compensation program, we still have a long way to go. Late last year the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) announced a 9.8 percent rate increase – just one year after a 29 percent hike.

We are hearing from people in almost every sector – small businesses, non-profits, social service, health care organizations and others – that **rate increases are hurting their ability to be profitable.** This, in turn, is hurting employees and their families.

L&I is required to keep rates "the lowest necessary to maintain actuarial solvency." A recent report by PricewaterhouseCoopers, a reputable accounting firm, has called into question the necessity of any increase in rates. Rather than addressing these concerns, the governor has formed a task force to study our workers' comp system – just as several other groups have done before. This is simply a diversionary tactic designed to ward off substantive changes. Rather than more delays and study groups, we need **action.** Without it, the burden of a broken workers compensation system will continue to drag down employers and eliminate jobs in our state. It's time to get to the heart of the program



and make it more cost-effective, see that workers are treated fairly, help businesses keep costs under control and look at opening up the system to other insurance carriers. These goals continue to be a top priority for us in the 2004 legislative session.

## Tort Reform: It's Important to Everyone

Many people think of tort reform in terms of the medical industry. And it's no wonder: escalating medical malpractice premiums are forcing many health care providers to close their doors. But the same holds true for almost every other industry. Employers everywhere are **struggling to pay skyrocketing premiums** to protect themselves against lawsuits.

Because this problem is affecting so many people, there is rising public support for sensible liability reform that puts limits on non-economic damages (those not directly related to the injury). The Liability Reform Coalition (LRC), a broad coalition of businesses, local governments, health care professionals, non-profits and others committed to **reasonable tort reform**, recently commissioned a study of Washington voters by two independent research firms. The findings were significant. Fully 75 percent of those surveyed believe awards for non-economic damages are excessive, and 72 percent support limiting them. Nearly 60 percent believe personal injury lawsuits are hurting the economy and making Washington a less attractive place to do business.

This year House Republicans have introduced a bill (HB 3030) that encompasses nearly a dozen tort reforms, from placing caps on non-economic damages (i.e., pain and suffering) to limiting contractors' liability risks. If you would like to see this bill pass, contact House Judiciary Committee Chair Pat Lantz, D-26th District, and ask her to give this bill a hearing. You can reach her through the Legislative Hotline, 1-800-562-6000.



## Legislation important to the 7th District

We are sponsoring and supporting legislation this year that directly helps people here in North-eastern Washington. Here are a few of those ideas:

### RMAP LAW: Bureaucrats must not be allowed to weaken its intent!

Last session we passed legislation, which exempted small landowners from the road maintenance and abandonment planning (RMAPs) and streamlined the environmental checklist for medium-sized forest landowners who harvest less than 2 million board-feet of timber per year. House Bill 1095 passed the Legislature with unanimous support and was signed into law by the governor in May.

Last month the Forest Practice Board adopted new emergency rules for RMAP which blatantly disregarded last year's legislation. Many of the rules clearly add to the power and authority to regulate against small forest landowners and fly in the face of the intent of the legislation. Once again bureaucrats in Olympia are adopting regulations that reflect their own agendas and not the intention the Legislature. We are supporting legislation to provide more accountability in the rule-making process, and give greater consideration to the concerns of citizens and the effects of agency rules on Washingtonians.

### FORESTS: Developing a plan to keep our forests healthy

Our forests are increasingly unhealthy – trees are diseased, growth is too dense and we have too many non-native pests and plants. These problems have resulted in out-of-control wildfires and loss of wildlife habitat. Although the federal government is working on this issue, there is no updated plan in Washington for keeping our forests healthy. Rep. McMorris is sponsoring a bill – in conjunction with a bill Sen. Morton has introduced this year – that would require we study the health of our forests and develop recommendations for ways to expedite the salvage of timber from disease-infested, fire and wind damaged forests on both public and private lands.

## **GOLD MINING: Easing up on recreational restrictions**

Washington has some of the most restricted rules for those wishing to recreationally pan for gold on state lands. We will be supporting legislation to exempt small scale mining operations from the Department of Fish and Wildlife's hydraulic permit permitting requirements and allow the Department of Natural Resources to permit recreational prospecting on their lands without having to charge excessive rates.

## **DECREASING THE COUGAR POPULATION: Protecting people from cougar attacks**

Recently several cougar attacks in California have made the news. Closer to home two young



girls from Washington were stalked by a cougar while hiking in the woods, and had to jump into a river to escape. The reality is that there are simply too many cougars for the amount of wilderness we have left in our state. The predatory activities of cougars have put people, domestic stock and household pets at

risk. We will again work to convince our colleagues from the west side, to adopt policies that put people's needs before the interests of wildlife.

## **CONTROLLING NOXIOUS WEEDS: Increasing the number of pesticide applicators**

During the 1990s the number of people licensed to apply pesticides dropped dramatically due to stringent licensing and certification require-



ments and high fees. That became a serious problem for landowners in Northeast Washington, an area with serious noxious weed concerns. In 1999, Rep. McMorris sponsored a bill directing the Agriculture department to conduct a pilot project breaking the licenses into three tiers – two of them new with restrictions on the types of pesticides that could be applied but with less stringent fees and certification requirements. We've evaluated this pilot project and it's been a success. This year we want to make the three-tiered licensing a permanent arrangement.

## **AND THERE'S MORE...**

- HB 2605 – We are both sponsoring a bill that would allow outdoor burning in areas no longer designated a "nonattainment" area by the federal government.
- HB 2506 – This proposal would give property owners who find themselves "land locked" by state-owned land a way to gain access to their property over that public land.



# The 2004 legislative session: Get involved!

Information about the 2004 legislative session is as close as your keyboard and your television. There are plenty of ways to get involved and stay informed on issues important to you.

## Information on the Internet:

### State government:

[www.access.wa.gov](http://www.access.wa.gov)

### Legislative information:

[www.hrc.leg.wa.gov](http://www.hrc.leg.wa.gov)

### Understanding the legislative process:

- Go to the House of Representative's web site: **[www.leg.wa.gov/house/](http://www.leg.wa.gov/house/)**
- Click on "General Info"
- There you will find the "Guide to Effective Legislative Participation" and information about the law-making process

### Best way to check the status of bills:

- Go to the Legislature's web site: **[www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov)**
- Click on "Bill Info"
- There you will find a host of information relating to each bill passing through the Legislature

### Other ways to get information and assistance:

**We would be happy to speak to your group, organization or school.** Topics might include:

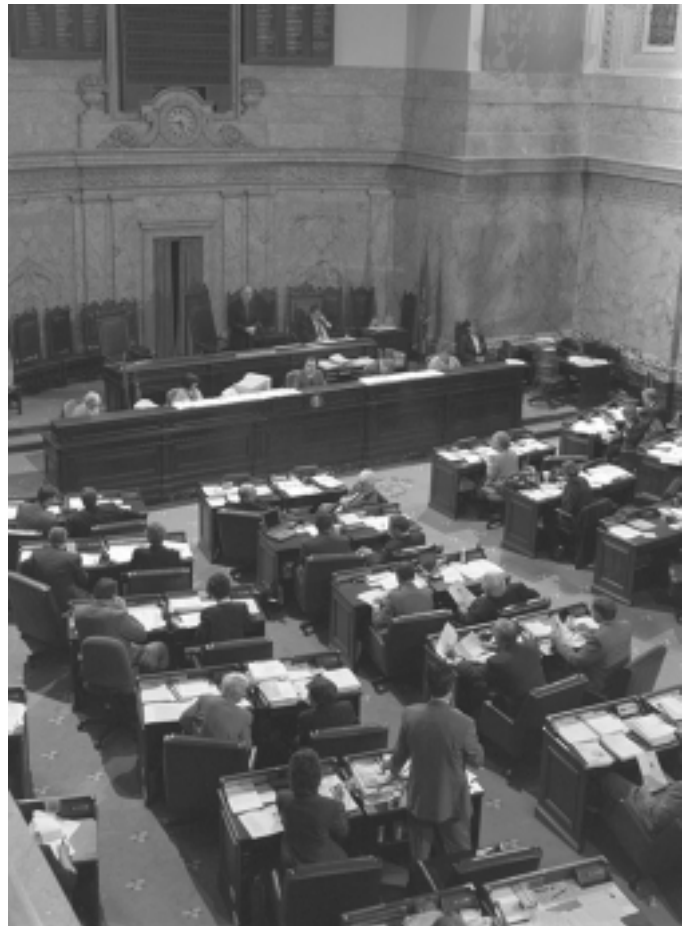
- Issues before the Legislature
- How does the legislative process work?
- What it's like to be a legislator
- Issues specific to the 7th legislative district

### Watch TVW.

TVW (TV Washington), a non-profit public affairs network, broadcasts the Legislature on cable TV throughout the state. Check with your local cable company to see if it carries TVW, or call TVW for programming information at (360) 586-5555, or visit its website at **[www.tvw.org](http://www.tvw.org)**.

### Ask for assistance.

Legislators are elected to serve you. If you are facing challenges working with a state agency, contact us to see how we can help.



## 2004 Legislative Mailing Restrictions

We will attempt to keep you informed on the issues mentioned in this mailer and others that come before the 2004 Legislature. Due to election year mailing restrictions, however, our ability to communicate with the people we represent is severely limited.

Thankfully, we are allowed to respond to ALL specific, written requests from the citizens of the 7th District. If you would like to be updated on the happenings in the Legislature, please send a letter or E-mail to our office regarding your interest.



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